

Flight of the Butterfly

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Паунова
пеперутка -
Inachis io

For many people they are beautiful, wonderful and colourful, but for some they are ugly, poisonous and frightening. In some cultures, butterflies are the symbol of the soul, mind and rebirth. They may be official state symbols as is the case in some American states.

Butterflies are everywhere around us, they are one of the oldest beings on Earth, and they belong to the order of insects called *lepidoptera*. Macedonia is a small Balkan country with a great biodiversity. 203 species of butterflies and over 1500 species of moths have been registered in Macedonia. On the world entomological map Macedonia is marked as a European Hot Spot, because of the fact that our country has endemic butterflies which

are on the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) list of endangered species. There are unique species of butterflies originating from the Glacial Period which managed to survive hiding in rock crevices. Scientists call them "the hiding species".

Favourable climate and rich flora are the reason behind the diversity of butterflies in Macedonia. Wherever you are in the country, you can observe the calm flight of butterflies from the first weeks of February. Among the earliest butterflies is the lemon yellow *Gonepteryx Rhamni*.

In this beautiful country you can find both Mediterranean and Continental butterflies due to the combination of semi-Mediterranean climate in the Adriatic basin and continental climate in the north.

Alpine relief with low altitude mountains is especially favourable for rich endemic butterfly fauna.



Цар Пие Вода – Papilio Machaon

One of the endemic butterflies existing only in Macedonia bears the name of the Macedonian who first described this species.



Pseudochazara cigovskii

The most beautiful of the endemic butterfly species can be found in Galicica National Park.



Аполонова пеперутка - Parnassius Apollo

Parnassius Apollo, endemic
 /— Macedonicus
 \— Dardanicus

The endemic Parnassius Apollo that can be found on Galicica Mountain is an endangered species on the INCNI list that is also banned for trade.

In the 1980s one could see there even the rare Gonepteryx Cleopatra butterfly that lives on the Olympus Mountain in Greece. There have also been some recent sightings of this butterfly in Dojran.



Gonepteryx Cleopatra

The biggest moth in Macedonia is Eudia pavonia (or *НОКЕН ПАУНОВЕЦ*) with the wingspan of 12 cm.

Moths are usually active at night, but Zygaenidae is an unusual moth that





also flies by day. Scientists explain this behaviour by the fact that it is poisonous and thus safe from birds and other insects.

METAMORPHOSIS

Usually the life span of a butterfly is one year at the most, but some species hibernate through the winter and live longer. Butterflies have an interesting reproductive cycle known as metamorphosis. The first phase is egg, the second phase – larva (caterpillar), third – pupa (chrysalis), and, finally, adult butterfly.

In the caterpillar phase some of the

butterflies change their outer layer twice, but some as many as four or five times. Butterflies pass the winter as pupa, and the explosion of reproduction happens in the spring. The first to emerge as adults are the so-called “white butterflies” of the Pieridae family.

If you have a wish to get to know Macedonian butterflies, the Natural Science Museum in Skopje possess an impressive collection of all Macedonian butterflies and a few exotic species which had been received as gifts from its friends in other countries. The world of butterflies is open to new enthusiasts, but beware, as a Macedonian saying goes, when they catch your eye they may steal your heart.

